

A Christian View of Science – Worldview & Apologetics Adult SS Class

Assertion #1

If we have a Christian view of science, we will understand that science is an important means toward achieving one of the initial commands given to man by God – the dominion mandate.

-The Creation Mandate (Cultural Mandate, Adamic Mandate or Dominion Mandate)

Genesis 1:26 “Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Genesis 1:28 “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

How does science help accomplish this?

- Man is the image of God. One distinctive way that man is set apart from the rest of God’s creatures is his ability to use knowledge to manipulate, develop, and harness the creation. This is a God-like trait that man has as his image bearer. Gaining knowledge is powerful because it enables man to control and use things. Thus, the marvelous and amazing power of nuclear energy, man traveling to and investigating the moon, the ability to drill deep into the earth and extract resources to make things and to produce energy, the sound and sights of an F-15 fighter jet passing by and countless other things that man has developed through the vehicle of science are part of the fulfillment of this dominion mandate given to man by his Creator. God is the one who has ordered His world such that man would so increase in knowledge that these things would take place. And it just so happens that this type of development has rapidly advanced and accelerated in the last 200 years of the history of the world. For the dominion mandate to happen, true knowledge about the world and the living things in the world must be obtained. Faulty views do not promote development and dominion. It is only correct views of how things are and how they work that empowers man to do this God-given task.

-Science is (1) a method; (2) a body of knowledge; (3) the theories used to explain the facts; and (4) a community of specialized experts who advance theories and knowledge via peer reviewed and critiqued journals, presentations, and meetings.

-Science, as it has come to be in modern times, is for the most part rigorous, empirical, precise, and will not settle for mere appearances in the way it seeks to explain things.

-Man is finite, fallen and entertains all kinds of preconceived, erroneous notions and is, therefore, easily deceived and prone to make mistakes. The rigorous approach to testing and careful observations and measurements can help overcome this.

Assertion #2

If we have a Christian view of science, we will understand and appreciate the Christian and Biblical foundations for modern science.

How exactly is the Bible a sound basis for science? Well – testing, observing, analyzing, and studying (the things involved in doing science) all imply or assume or require a certain view of reality – i.e., that the physical realm exist and be real, that our senses are reliable, that language/math describe accurately the physical realm, ...

But in order to philosophically justify or provide a basis for these things being true that we are assuming when we do science, we cannot use science to do so or we've already assumed these to be correct. They are presuppositions or assumptions we make in order to get started with science. We can't use science to test them or we are holding ourselves up in the air by our bootstraps.

Different views of the world and reality do a better or worse job at providing justification for these things really being so and true. The Christian/Biblical worldview with God as the Creator who created for the purpose that men would know and glorify Him through the creation provides the very best known justification for the presuppositions of science.

- Science is based on some presuppositions about the nature of the world and reality
- Some of the presuppositions of science
 - (1) The physical universe exists (i.e., is real)
 - (2) The physical world is ordered (not just imposed order by the mind)
 - (3) The order in the natural world is simple enough for humans to comprehend
 - (4) The human mind is complex enough to understand the order that is there
 - (5) The senses and mind of man are reliable
 - (6) Language, (mathematics included), accurately describes the physical realm
 - (7) The law of cause and effect is valid
 - (8) The unseen can be inferred from the seen
 - (9) There is a uniformity of nature in terms of time (past, present, and future)
 - (10) The uniformity of nature in terms of space (here, there, and in-between)
 - (11) Our limited experiments can be applied to formulate universal laws
 - (12) Natural laws and processes are unifiable
- None of these presuppositions have any philosophical justification apart from a Biblical Worldview
- Scientists generally just assume them to do their science but they don't know why they are valid and they have no basis for them. Christians can explain why all of these are valid assumptions.
- The doctrine of the Creator explains or justifies these presuppositions of science
- The doctrine of the Creator states that **God created the physical universe so that all men everywhere, throughout all time, could know Him and glorify Him through it.**
- This doctrine helps us understand why it was within a Christian milieu that modern science arose. And this doctrine is derived right out of Scripture. **(Romans 1:20 – For**

since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse; Psalm 19:1 – The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork; Acts 14:15-17)

- The founders of practically all of the major disciplines of science were professing Christians or people who took the Bible very seriously. (See handout titled “Christian Founders of Key Scientific Disciplines”)

-Therefore, we can be emphatic with skeptics that a Christian worldview and perspective is not anti-science. Rather, a Biblical worldview provides the needed foundation for science to even get started.

Assertion #3

A Christian view of science will understand that there are limits as to what science can study and discover. Christians should not overstate the importance of science or deify it.

Modern science has come to be dominated by philosophical naturalism or materialism. According to this view of reality, only those things that are material and open to study by scientific methods are real.

Secular scientists, therefore, only look for natural or material causes and explanations for everything, including origins.

Science’s inability to study or deal with the supernatural is not a basis for dismissing the supernatural. Rather, this inability of science needs to be known and understood as a ***limitation of science not of reality***. Science does not get to be God and define the rules for what counts as true knowledge.

A Christian view of science will recognize that there are other valid ways besides empirical ones to arrive at knowledge (supernatural revelation, testimony by reliable witnesses, etc.)

Another limitation of science is that it is a finite, human endeavor. Thus, it is subject to revision and changes because it can be wrong or partially wrong. And where it is wrong, it is often resistant to change until the mounting evidence reaches a breaking point and something akin to a revolution occurs (Thomas Kuhn).

God is the most important reality that anyone can study, and yet, God is not known or studied by scientific methods. **(I Corinthians 1:21) “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”**

Most Christians now and throughout history have not been involved with science. In terms of eternal priorities God has not emphasized science and we should note that. Man, in his pride, can often overestimate the importance of his knowledge and abilities.

Assertion #4

If we hold to a Christian view of science, it will necessarily be different from the currently popular views of secular science – But in what ways?

Perhaps the most fundamental difference in a Christian view of science is that the ultimate standard of authority and truth will be the Bible and not science.

- The secular view is that “Science Rules” – the Bill Nye perspective
- The Christian view is that the “Bible Rules”

Romans 3:4 “...let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.”

Psalm 119:160a “The entirety of Your Word is truth...”

1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith (Chp.1, para.1) “The Holy Scripture is the all-sufficient, certain, and infallible rule or standard of the knowledge, faith, and obedience that constitute salvation.”

(Chp.1, para.6) “The sum total of God’s revelation concerning all things essential to His own glory, and to the salvation and faith and life of men, is either explicitly set down or implicitly contained in the Holy Scripture.”

(I Timothy 6:20) “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.”

Example: Human beings who have been dead about 3 days do not rise again according to the consensus scientific opinion of the experts. But passages like Matthew 27:52-53 and I Corinthians 15:20 assert otherwise, so science is incorrect at this point.

Remember that the view of the world and its history, as described in the Bible, cannot be equated with the currently popular secular scientific views. Attempting to make them say the same thing is futile and damaging to both the Bible and science.

In particular, the claims of science most subject to error are the highly speculative, extrapolation based theories, areas of science dealing with historical reconstructions that are highly subjective, and origins.

- Large scale “evolution” – or Blind Watchmaker type evolution

- The view that only natural explanations are reality

- The dismissal of miracles

The time frame of historical events (earth history and archeology)

We must not throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is a nugget of truth in just about every error science makes. Some of what is called biological evolution is observable fact and does explain many features of animals and plants. But these are not the important claims of evolution and these facts do not contradict Scripture. The Bible, itself, clues us in to the fact that things can vary within limits (all races and sizes of people descended from 2 original humans)

When no resolution is evident in a conflict between a clear teaching of Scripture and the claims of modern science, we must patiently trust God like Abraham did (who contrary to hope in hope believed – **Romans 4:18**)

- Remember the upright buried trees at Mt. St. Helens

We must be prepared to oppose and or correct those professing Christians who try to convince us and others that the Bible should be accommodated to science. This perspective that the Bible rules only some of the time and science rules in some areas needs to be challenged. It may present itself in a number of catchy phrases or cliches, some of which have a kernel or truth to them : (1) “The Bible is authoritative in spiritual matters whereas science has authority in the physical realm” (2) “The Bible tells us Who did it and Why; science tells us How He did it” (3) “The Bible grapples with human morality, while science explains reality.” (4) “God has two books of revelation – nature and scripture” (5) “The Bible is not a textbook of science”

The Christian view of science must maintain the absolute authority of the Bible, but we must also be very aware that good Christians can and have misapplied the Bible when trying to derive scientific information from Scripture.

- The historical context in which the Bible was written must be appreciated (including the way the language of the Bible is used)
- The purpose of Scripture must be appreciated
- Our own biases and desires must be guarded against

In arguing against the heliocentric view and for the geocentric view, some of the Reformers fell into this trap:

Example: (Martin Luther) “People gave ear to an upstart astrologer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heavens or the firmament, the sun and the moon. ...This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture tells us [Joshua 10:13] that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.”

(Melancthon) “ The eyes are witnesses that the heavens revolve in the space of twenty four hours. But certain men, either from the love of novelty, or to make a display of ingenuity, have concluded that the earth moves; and they maintain that neither the eighth sphere nor the sun revolves... Now, it is a want of honesty and decency to assert such

notions publicly, and the example is pernicious. It is the part of a good mind to accept truth as revealed by God and to acquiesce in it.”

(Calvin) In his commentary on *Genesis*, cited the opening verse of the Ninety-third Psalm - “the earth also is stablished, that it cannot be moved” - and he demanded, “Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?”

- Therefore, we must hold certain opinions related to Bible/Science issues with less certainty than we do other clearly stated facts of Scripture (i.e., we don't add to or take away from the Word of God)

Examples:

-Exact age of the earth (Ussher chronology) – Does the Bible explicitly provide this? We have evidence in Scripture for a young earth but not for a specific age.

-Impact of Noah's Flood – Does the Bible lay out in detail what the Genesis Flood accomplished geologically? No it doesn't. So, we can't be as dogmatic about our inferences here as we can explicit claims of Scripture.

- The bottom line – the claims of science may alert us to problem areas in our Biblical interpretation. Science cannot usurp authority so that we are forced to change our interpretation. But upon investigation of the Scriptures, we may be persuaded that we were wrong.

Another difference within a Christian view of science is that there must be a qualified or modified uniformity to nature. (In other words, miracles have and will occur in the real world and there is a supernatural realm that may be intruded into the natural order from time to time as God sees fit)

-God has established regularity in the physical realm for the stability of the world and to reveal truth about His orderly nature. This uniformity or regularity in nature allows for the doing of experimental science.

(Genesis 8:22) “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”

-But God also makes it clear that He will not be bound by the regular or predictable nature of events in the physical realm (in other words God has and will perform miracles that defy a strict uniformity to nature such as is accepted by most secular scientists)

Assertion #5

A Christian view of science requires that we train ourselves to think in terms of God being always behind every secondary cause that science discovers.

- The doctrine of Providence

- The Bible teaches that God **“upholds all things by the Word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3) and that “in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:17)**

Example: The development of a hurricane

- When the most fundamental secondary cause for some phenomenon is discovered by science, the Christian will still maintain that God is behind it.
- The Bible teaches that in **God “we live and move and have our being”**
- The Bible teaches that not even the most insignificant happenings in the world take place apart from God’s sovereign activity and control (ex. A sparrow doesn’t die and fall to the ground without God’s direction of that event)
- So, if someone were to be studying hurricanes and their development, there may be a way to ultimately model and predict the development of a hurricane when all variables are known (all temperature factors, pressure factors, perturbations in the atmosphere, moisture levels, currents, prevailing winds, etc.) But then when every molecule of air and water and their role in instigating a hurricane has been explained, it will still be true that God upholds the entire physical system (atoms, subatomic particles, etc.) and He maintains by His providence that the molecular properties will be consistent with the properties He has established for the operation of His world. It still is a storm sent by God, ultimately, even if every single variable and factor which “causes” the hurricane formation can be described and predicted.

Assertion #6

A Christian view of science involves embracing the vast majority of the findings of modern science, but in sort of an eclectic approach.

- Do you take Advil or Tylenol?
- Do you drive an automobile?
- Do you wear sunscreen or mosquito repellent?
- Do you use electricity and electric appliances?
- Do you wear contacts or glasses?

One of the mysterious things about the way God has chosen to set up the world, is that even though all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are stored up in Christ; and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – yet, God has been pleased to give a tremendous amount of the task of exploring and explaining how things work in the physical world to non-Christians. It has been this way from very early on (Genesis 4:19-22) Here we have the ungodly line developing through Lamech. One of his wives bore Tubal-Cain who is said to have been “an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron.” This means that he and his predecessors learned how to mine metal ores and then developed expertise in metallurgy. Here is an early indication that the development of the world, in terms of the dominion mandate, would not be exclusive to the godly line by any means.

We are not to fear this. In God's providence, ultimately for the good of His people, non-Christians have developed many useful things. We are to embrace the truth and knowledge that is discovered. God's people are to love wisdom and knowledge and truth. That is what we are all about. This is one of the reasons why trying to live in the past (like the Amish, and groups with that kind of mentality) are dishonoring God by such a response to discovery and development. It is, in effect, a rejection of truth and knowledge that has been discovered by man.

It would make things so much easier if only people with the correct foundation could produce true scientific knowledge. Then we would be able to just turn to Henry Morris and we would have all that we need in science. But God has not done things that way. The vast majority of modern science, and thus the discoveries and knowledge obtained, is carried out by non-Christians (there aren't too many Ken Jameses in the world). And God expects us to utilize those discoveries and to receive that knowledge (when it is true and not at odds with the Bible) as part of the creation mandate for mankind in the world. So, we must filter, reinterpret, and reject some of what modern science says. But the vast majority of what modern science is discovering about the natural world is real knowledge and is to be received by us and should be a source of praise and adoration to our God. Ungodly men tell us about the vastness of space and stars – we praise God for it. Ungodly men tell us about the intricacies of microscopic DNA molecules – we praise God for it. This may not make us comfortable but this is how God has chosen to run the world He made. Non-believers in Christ do advance knowledge. Often times we must take the humble position of learning from them while not embracing their unbelief. In this sense we are like Israel of old “plundering the Egyptians” We take what they have worked to obtain. We use it to fuel our praise to God and to better understand the greatness of our God

Definition of eclectic – (1) selecting what appears to be the best in various doctrines, methods, or styles; (2) composed of elements drawn from various sources.

- Secular science sources
- Intelligent design sources
- Creation science sources

Secular scientists will criticize Christians for picking and choosing, especially in areas of origins. But we must recognize and point out the difference between observable, repeatable facts of science and extrapolations or theories used to explain the facts.

Assertion #7

Finally, if we have a Christian view of science, we will be optimistic and excited about the opportunity we have to study or support the study of God's world.

- Christians can make dramatic contributions (Example: John Bumgardner)
- There are many erroneous ideas hindering progress (Christians can bring fresh thought and presuppositions to problems that secular science has been unable to explain.
- ID movement and Creation Science are continuing to make advances in the public arena around the world (even though there are many setbacks)
- The more science discovers and we become knowledgeable about, the more aspects of God's power and wisdom to praise him for. (similar to the arts – if we learn how to play an instrument we will be able to employ it in the praise of God)